

Society Lies

I worked as volunteer at a drug and alcohol rehab center for a few months. It was part of spiritual healing understanding addiction patterns that run in my family, also part of my ancestral heritage, inherited wounds. The center is located in a part of town I never knew existed and never wish to ever visit again. Across the street from it is a county mission for homeless people funded by tax dollars; one street over is a religious charity mission. The difference between them is night and day. More on that later. The rehab center receives addicts sent there from various courts as last chance to sobriety. The perfect slave is one who says, "I am not a slave." It is the alcoholic or drug addict that denies his or her enslavement to addiction – I am not an addict; I control my habit... An example is someone released from the drunk-tank for a third time this week without recall of how or why s/he was in there. It is only after hearing charges from the bench that the addict becomes vaguely aware of a problem. Denial is powerful especially to an addicted mind that does not wish to face detox pain, which is the least of it overall. Instead of re-release to begin another binge, which starts by finding the nearest bar, package store or pusher for a bracer, a court sheriff or other authority delivers the addict into our custody. The rules were simple obey them or face jail. When addiction does the talking, an addict's desperation and denial are very smooth bargainers at making excuses especially when trying to get out of the center for a drink or fix. Detox is a very gruesome process but necessary to their recovery. After that, ninety percent of the battle is convincing an addict that s/he has a problem. Denial is a very large barrier to sobriety. Though once past it, then comes the hardest part – initial and lifelong recovery, which begins after detox. Tough love with a rehabilitating addict is mandatory because their addiction controls the person and generally the people in their lives. Healing involves many, very drastic life changes - mental, emotional, spiritual and physical; severity depends upon how long the person has been using. Addiction is very charming, and tough love counters it proper. I learned many valuable lessons that were unavailable anywhere else. First, never judge the addiction; they are all the same: self-medication to escape reality. Addiction is the magic carpet rides that always crash and burn with addict and original problems or baggage tangled in the wreckage. Each ride only adds to make things worse. Second, never Ask why the craving but always ask why the pain, which drives all addiction. Tame the pain to tame the addiction. Addiction is as gender neutral as it gets – it treats men and women equally brutal. Women and men addicts were in different parts of the complex. Mixing staff genders with them was highly discouraged. Sometimes it was necessary while following certain precautions; for, it is too easy to become emotionally involved through a dependent-codependent dynamic via induced emotional bonding to a member of the opposite sex or sometimes to the same gender. An addict's sheer neediness is seductive and consuming almost like a

newborn baby's bonding to a parent or surrogate. Tough love distancing is for both the helper and helped to avoid this involvement. Another occupational hazard, as it were, is psychological transference and projective identification. Under these influences the addict and staff member become psychologically intermeshed - synchronized into one spirit as it were. That is what finally caused me to toss in the towel and resign after the sixth month. I was personally, empathetically internalizing center addict's pain during treatment and could not shake free of it. The sheer human frailty and emotional pain in that place was overwhelming to me. Staff turnover was high because of aforewritten dynamics. Sometimes, staff members who were also recovering addicts relapsed into recidivism and self-medicated induced pain reviving *their* addictions. That is how strong induced emotions can be. For instance, the break room was a common area to both men's and women's wings. I met a recovering clinical psychologist who was a toss-pot slinging, alcoholic. She drank a fifth or more each day to self-medicate away the effects of psychological transference picked up from her patients. Their pain so internalized in her that she could not shake it free, either. Plans after recovery were to use her education in another field. Projective identification, induced emotions and psychological transference are unseen but very real psyche killers to emphatic people like she and I.

A county mission for homeless people existed across from rehab and one street over was a charity mission. The charity was a wild west, crazy, free for all; county mission ran with military discipline and rules enforced by strict staff and Sheriff dept. security personnel. One day my curiosity got the best of me after watching comings and goings through the rehab center's front plate glass window. Each day street people began drifting in to wait until it opened; some never left remaining day and night on the well lighted tarmac & parking lot where it was safer than under a bridge or other isolated place after dark. It was a slow day and curiosity got the best of me, so I ventured over for a closer look. ***Mass media constantly preaches that homeless people want to be that way.*** Something about that did not seem right to me; so, I thought this would be a good time to find the truth. Homeless people were waiting for a meal, to clean up and spend a night in bed safely out of the elements and street crime. They were scattered all over tarmac around the mission with all their meager possessions in a plastic or paper grocery bag or two. They were sundry and myriad street people from very old men to young women and kids all waiting for center to open. The mission accepted women with kids first, next came husbands if any, and after that first come first served until occupancy reached capacity. The rest remained outside waiting until mealtime to enter, eat and leave the building. The locked sleeping quarters remained so until dining area closed and emptied of any outsiders. But to digress - I walked up to mission entry door and rang the bell. A woman's voice barked over the intercom, 'We are not open yet...' I replied, 'ma'am I work at rehab across the street. It is a slow day and I am curious; would you give me a tour of what you folks do here?' 'One moment please,' she said. A minute or two

later she and a large guard opened the door, eyed me over then let me in turning away tailgaters trying to follow in behind before closing and re-locking the door. After introductions all around, she dismissed the guard and gave me the silver dollar tour. The place was no-nonsense, functional, orderly and clean, and military strict without frills of any kind, and designed to accommodate many people in the most efficient manner possible. Every space was used to greatest capacity. Community male and female showers and bathrooms lacked privacy. The dining area was streamlined effectiveness and staffed to serve many people very quickly. Bedding area had well worn numbered cots, and numbered pallets in surrounding areas leaving only narrow aisles between them. Security was very strict; banishing for good anyone out of line who in any way threatened order, which rarely happened. These desperate derelicts had no place else to go and knew it. When possible, staff sought to keep families together. I was very impressed and felt for the first time in my taxpaying lifetime that some of those purloined resources were being put to good use. Problem is, our politicians are not doing their jobs. Not enough funding – which they waste on political boondoggles – goes to this sort of work. The tour lasted about an hour. When over, my tour guide escorted me to a side door and said, ‘thanks for your interest. Most people do not care one whit about these people...’ I reciprocated gratitude as she opened the steel door adding a final warning, ‘*do not give any of these people a thing especially not money*. I know you wish to help but they will mob and hurt you; not intentionally but out of desperation...’ They are like children: give to one you must give to them all... Then I asked her, ‘the news media constantly tells everyone that the homeless want to be like this, is that true?’ She simply said, ‘*why don’t you ask **them***’ sweeping her arm and hand across a full parking lot of homeless awaiting food and a nights shelter. Then very quickly let me out through the open door, and while closing it behind me again sternly cautioned, “**For your safety do not give them money! Go back to the center!**” On the way back at tarmac edge, I stopped and looked into the face of a young woman with two small kids with all their belongings stuffed in a plastic grocery sack next to her. I stopped and looked deeply into their faces for what seemed very long minutes; she mustered a faint smile...I did not have the strength to ask her if she and those kids wanted to be there. Instead, I wanted to throw up. The pain was all I needed for her answer. Three days later, I resigned from the rehab center much wiser about many things, especially this one - **society lies**....